

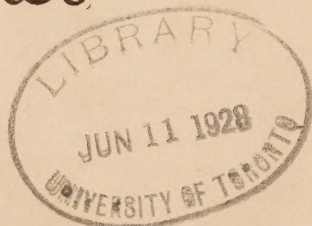
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The Preparation Belts for the Market



Department of the Interior
CANADA

W. W. Cory, C.M.G.
Deputy Minister

Issued by
Resources Intelligence Service
F. C. C. Lynch, Director

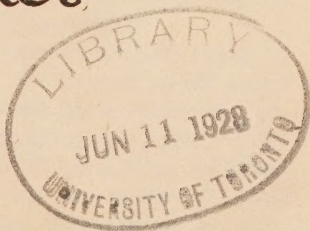
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The Preparation of Pelts for the Market




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Hon. Charles Stewart
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The Preparation of Pelts for the Market

To those who have no wide knowledge of the trapping or skinning of animals there are many interesting facts to be disclosed. First of all, if the maximum of advantage is to be obtained, it is of the utmost importance to know the proper time for taking the animals, in order that the pelts may be in what is known as "prime" condition.

If it could be possible to have every pelt taken in prime condition the value of the Canadian fur catch would each season be increased by millions of dollars. Unfortunately this condition has never been attained owing to the lack of knowledge in some essentials. More than half of the pelts of some species taken prove "blue" on examination, in other words, unprime, and grading not higher than No. 2 in quality. There seems no reason to doubt that if proper foresight and attention were given by individuals to their trapping enterprises, the pelts taken might be nearly 100 per cent prime. An experienced fur man can determine quite readily the season at which a pelt has been taken, by the appearance of the skin and overhair. When dried an unprime skin has a bluish appearance on the flesh side down the back and sides. When prime it has a creamy white

colour. It is desirable to capture fur-bearers when prime, because the fur and overhair are heavier and fuller then and do not easily fall out. The pelts of most of the animals become prime some time about the end of November, although in a country so great in area as Canada some variation may obtain.

The beauty of certain pelts is due largely to the overhair. It is the long, glossy, silver-black overhair that gives the prime silver fox pelt its great superiority as a money-getter over one that is rubbed or unprime.

SKINNING

Generally speaking two methods of skinning, varying with the animal being treated, are practised—the “open” and the “cased.” So far as the general run of Canadian fur-bearing animals is concerned, those methods and groupings, as hereunder shown, apply:—

Open method.—Badger, beaver, bear.

Cased method.—Fox, fisher, marten, otter, lynx, muskrat, mink, skunk, weasel, wolf, wolverine.

Either cased or open.—Raccoon, wildcat, rabbit (higher grades of rabbit pelts should be “open”).

In the *open* method the legs are cut off at the first joint and the skin split up the inside to the slit which is cut along the belly from the lower jaw to

the vent. The tail is cut open to extract the bone. The skins are stretched flat or "open." Legs of bear should not be cut off at the first joint but left with both legs and claws so that if required they can be mounted for rugs, etc

The following is a brief description of the *cased* method: Slit skin on both hind legs on the under side of the animal from the heel to the vent. Skin out the legs to the feet. In the case of the mink, fox and timber wolf, skin out the toes and leave them and the claws on the skin. Skin around the tail leaving the tail attached to the skin, and after loosening the tail bone at the base take hold of it with your forefinger and pull it out of the tail. If the tail bone is hard to remove, split a stock, insert tail bone in split and with this to grip the bone you should have no trouble to pull it out. Now turn the skin back and carefully pull it off the body. Use a knife to start the skin if it does not come off easily, but be careful not to cut the pelt. Skin so that as little as possible of the flesh and fat adhere to the skin.

When the front legs are reached, skin around them near the body and then push them backward out of the skin (turn them inside out as we might say). Skin out the legs to the paws in the case of the mink, keeping the paws on the skin. Legs of timber wolf should not be cut off at the first joint

but left with both legs and claws so that if required they can be mounted for rugs. All legs of foxes should be skinned out to the toes and not cut off from the body as is sometimes done by trappers with the front legs of foxes. Muskrat, skunk and otter should have the front legs cut off at the first joint. Skin carefully around the head, pushing the skull back through the skin until the ears are reached. These should be cut off as near the skull as possible so that they remain attached to the skin. Some trappers leave the gristle in the ears of animals, thus causing them to taint before they have an opportunity to dry. If the gristle were removed this danger would be avoided. Then carefully skin around the eyes, not cutting the eyelids, and when the mouth and the nose are reached use care also. Do not pull the skin off the head, but remove carefully, for the heads of some animals are used in manufacturing the furs and all skins have a better appearance if the head is skinned out with care.

SCRAPING

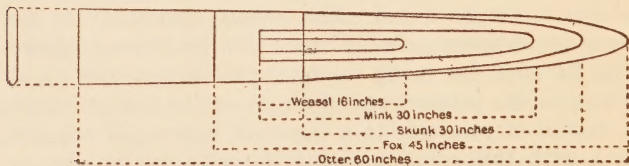
After skinning a considerable amount of fat may adhere to the skin. This must be removed by scraping. The skin is slipped on a fleshing board. The flesh and fat should be removed with the aid of

a dull knife or some similar tool. A piece of hard-wood shaped as a knife makes an excellent tool for scraping off fat. When scraping surplus fat from the skin it should be done from the tail towards the head and not down towards the tail. Too much scraping of the skin is injurious, it being necessary to remove only the fat and loose flesh. A skin which has become soiled or blood-stained should be thoroughly cleaned before being stretched. Blood can be removed immediately by washing with clear water; this should be continued as long as the water shows a tinge of red. Hot water should never be used in washing pelts. Grease can be removed from the fur side by using a mixture of peroxide and water in the proportions of about one to five or about a cupful of peroxide to a quart of water. Brush the pelt with this solution, using an ordinary hair-brush of good quality.

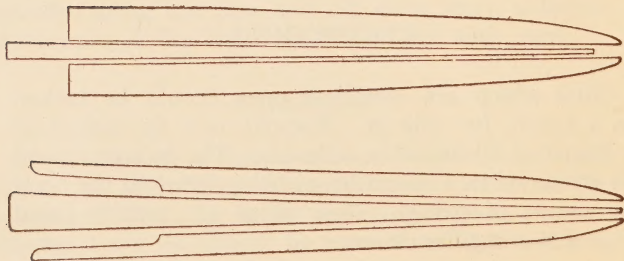
STRETCHING

Furs which are stretched open should be tacked to a board, fur side in. Raccoon may be tacked on a board or stretched in a frame. The beaver should be stretched in a round hoop, being laced to the hoop by means of strings. Bear skins are usually laced into a rectangular frame.

A wedge-shaped board rounded on the edges is used for stretching cased skins. On this board the pelts are placed with the fur side inwards, the back surface of the pelt being on the one side and the belly on the other side of the board. The stretching boards shown hereunder are typical of those in common use. Small wedges are sometimes inserted down the sides of the boards to permit the circulation of air. Wire stretchers are being used considerably, especially for muskrat, rabbit and other of the smaller pelts.



STRETCHING BOARDS



STRETCHING BOARDS WITH CENTRE WEDGE

APPROXIMATE SIZES OF STRETCHING BOARDS

—	Length	Width at Shoulders	Width at Base
Weasel.....	16 in.	1½ in.	2½ in.
Mink.....	30 "	3 "	4 "
Marten.....	25 "	3¼ "	4¼ "
Muskrat.....	20 "	5 "	7 "
Skunk.....	30 "	4 "	7½ "
Raccoon.....	30 "	6 "	9 "
Fisher.....	50 "	5½ "	8 "
Fox.....	45 "	5½ "	8 "
Otter.....	60 "	6 "	8 "
Lynx.....	60 "	6 "	9 "
Wolf.....	60 "	9 "	13 "

Stretching boards should be of sufficient length to permit of pelts being adjusted to meet variations in size.

Make a number of stretching boards according to the number of skins you are likely to handle and to fit the various animals you are trapping. In the making of boards, soft woods, permitting the easy driving or withdrawing of nails, should be used. (Shingle nails make good tacking nails.) A board three-eighths of an inch in thickness is usual in the case of the smaller animals and for the larger, five-eighths to three-quarter inches in thickness is considered ample. The edges of all stretching boards should be rounded and smooth.

The best stretched skins are those extended slightly in all directions. Mink and marten should be pulled slightly lengthwise and the lines of the sides should be only partly converging, or in other words, the board is only slightly narrower at the head of the skin than towards the tail. Do not stretch a skin so as to make it appear larger, for in so doing you will probably lose doubly in quality anything gained in size. The skins should be left on the stretchers until dry enough so that they will not wrinkle when removed.

DRYING

Never dry skins near a fire nor in the sun nor in a warm room, as they become singed and are lowered in value. Such skins invariably fall to pieces when put through the process of dressing. The proper and only way to dry furs is by cool air and by keeping them in a cool room until shipping time. When the pelts have become dry, which usually takes about two or three days, remove them from the boards and they are ready for shipping.

SHIPPING

Pack your skins neatly, open skins being placed fur side to fur side, so that the grease on the pelt side of one skin will not get on the fur of another. Place all furs of a kind together, laying them flat

(do not roll), and after placing a tag inside the shipment with your name and address and the name and address of the dealer to whom you are shipping, wrap securely in burlap and sew or tie up the shipment. The game laws of the various provinces require that all raw fur packages shipped have marked plainly on the outside of the package all the furs contained therein. Some express companies insist that skunk skins must be shipped in boxes. If your agent says you must ship in this way, use a light box, no larger than necessary, for heavy boxes add to the express charges. It is the careless trapper who mishandles his pelts and uses improper shipping methods that gets the minimum instead of the maximum price for his pelts.

The suggestions in the foregoing have been prepared by the Natural Resources Intelligence Service, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, Canada, from various sources and are believed to be in accordance with the best practice. Any further suggestions, additions or corrections, from persons with experience in fur handling, will be gladly welcomed by the Service.

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